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No. 499 .

THE DISCOVERY

AN EPISODE IN THE LIFE OF
COLUMBUS

IN ONE ACT

BY

HERMON GULD



"Great men are meteors that consume themselves to light
the earth."

THOMAS HARDY.

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SAMUEL FRENCH, 25 West 45th Street, New York City
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Free on Request

- 4 DEC. 1954

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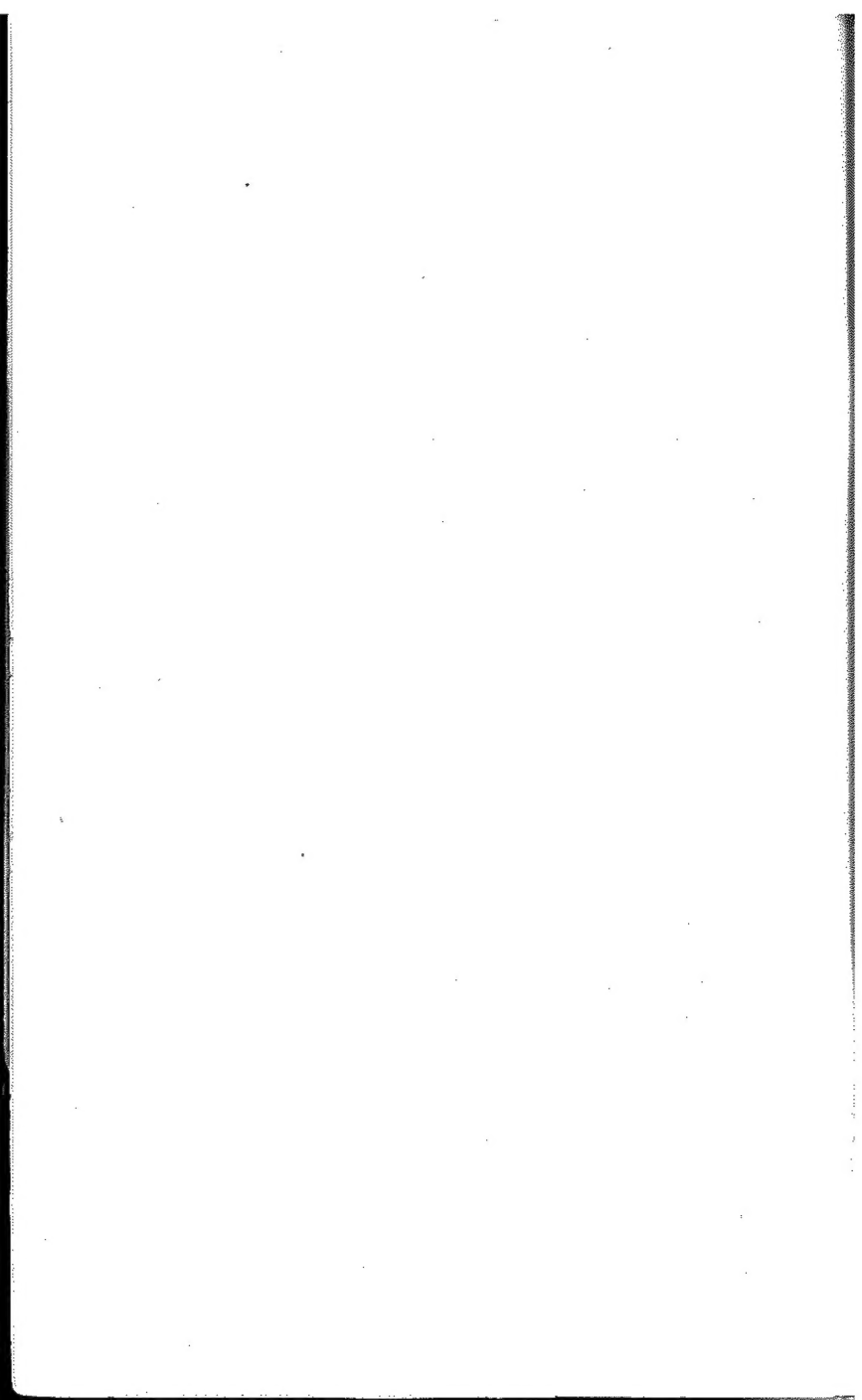
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NOTE: Christopher Columbus first saw the light of the New World on the night of 11th October, 1492. He was often "at open defiance" with his crew. These two circumstances, at least, are historical. For the rest, this little play had better be regarded as a work of imagination.





CHARACTERS

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS

PEDRO GUTIERREZ, *an officer*

PEPE, *a page boy*

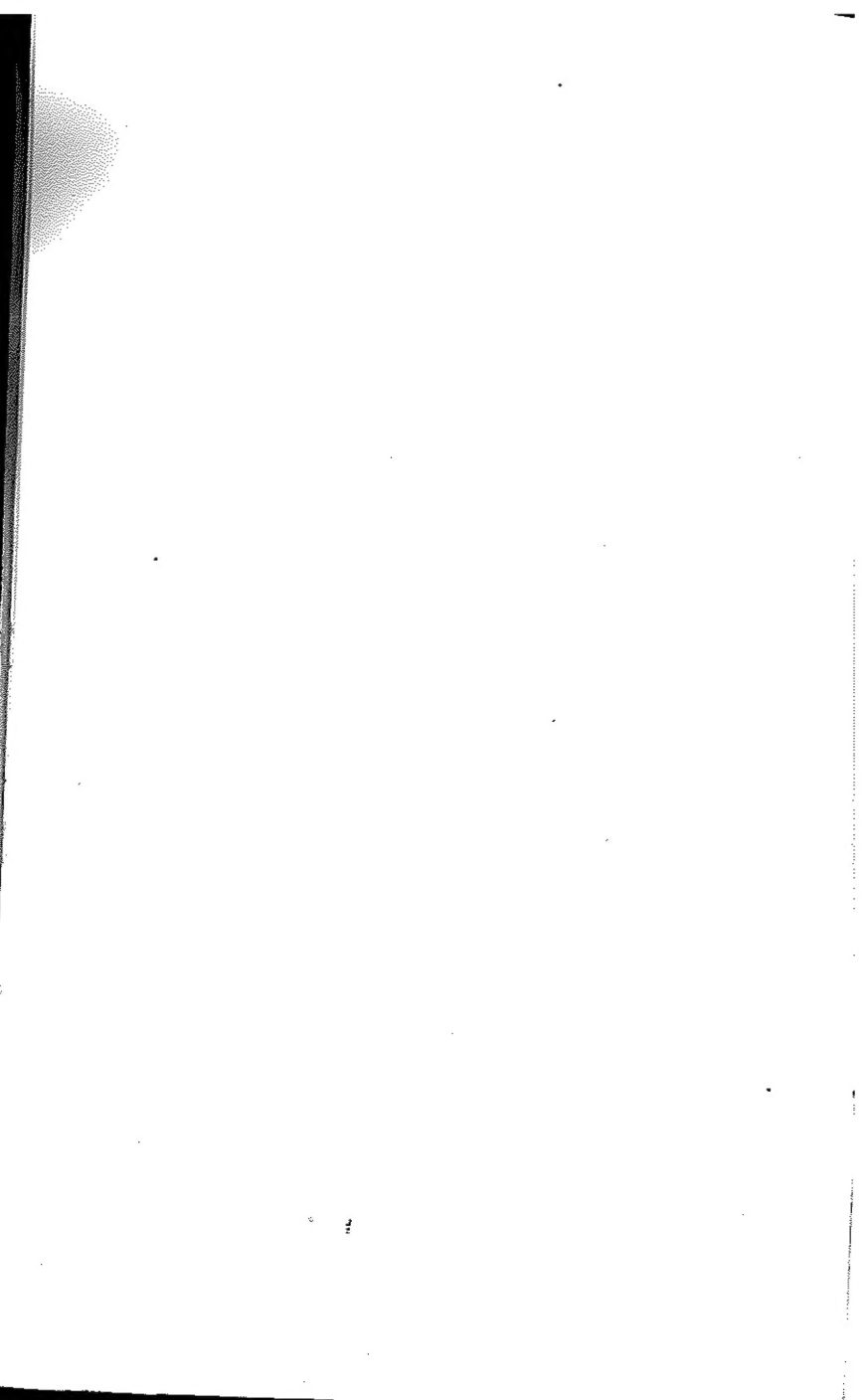
JUAN PATINO

DIEGO GARCIA

FRANCISCO

GUILLERMO IRES

} *Other Seamen*



THE DISCOVERY

SCENE: *On board the "Santa Maria."*

TIME: 11th October, 1492.

(The ship is seen from an angle which brings the poop somewhat to the left, the quarter-deck taking up the greater part of the stage. If it is visible, the midmast should bear a crucifix, in passing which everybody mechanically crosses himself. A large lantern, containing a lighted candle, is fixed at the extreme top of the poop. The night is still and there is little movement in the sails.)

(Two seamen are visible, both well to the right. JUAN is on his knees, adjusting rigging; DIEGO is helping. The actions of both of them are indeterminate, clearly designed to conceal their real purpose. They speak in loud whispers.)

DIEGO. Within the next half an hour he will go to the poop-head as sure as God's alive. He can't keep away from it. His eyes are glued on the sky as if he expected his precious New World to burst out of it like a thunderbolt! *(He laughs derisively.)*

JUAN. Poor wretch!

DIEGO. Now, then, Diego—quaking again!

JUAN. That's a lie! Why should I quake? What is there to fear? *(After a brief pause)* But I am sorry for him.

DIEGO. Why waste your pity? Shall it be one

madman, his head stocked with visions, or forty honest seamen pining for their homes?

JUAN. *Santisima Maria*, but he's a *gracious* madman . . .

DIEGO. (*Impatiently*) Gracious when all goes to his pleasure, but as irritable as a teething child when crossed!

(*The song of SEAMEN is heard; it is a scarcely distinguishable murmur:*)

Here's a keg o' rum
To Kingdom Come!
The Devil laughs,
But God is dumb!

JUAN. (*Sharply*) They ought to stop that. The Captain is always furious when he hears it.

DIEGO. Shan't we even sing to keep up our spirits? Sh!

(*They attend with assumed assiduity to the rigging. PEDRO GUTIERREZ comes in; he is somewhat surprised when he sees the others.*)

PEDRO. Who's that?

DIEGO. (*Rising*) Diego Garcia and Juan Patino, sir.

PEDRO. (*Inclined to be communicative*) It's dark. I would welcome the moon. . . .

DIEGO. Ay, ay, Don Pedro. Some of us would welcome the coast of Spain still more.

PEDRO. (*Pumping*) Impatient, Diego?

DIEGO. (*Surly*) There are limits to patience, sir.

PEDRO. (*Humoring him*) And you've reached them, eh?

DIEGO. We're like bats trying to fly by day. It's time he gave way. Why should one man have the lives of fifty in his hands?

PEDRO. (*With authority*) I hope we are not entertaining mutinous thoughts, Diego.

DIEGO. Mutiny is an ugly word, sir.

PEDRO. And an uglier deed.

(JUAN, finishing his job at the rigging, rises, and with a salute goes off. COLUMBUS comes on. He is a tall, well-built man of forty-six. Hair prematurely white, complexion fair, almost ruddy. A man of quick temper and irritability which he controls only with an effort. His face, in repose, is melancholy. Seeing DON PEDRO in conversation with DIEGO, he looks a trifle suspicious. He turns quickly to DIEGO.)

COLUMBUS. That candle on the foremast is guttering; see that it is put right.

DIEGO. (*Sullenly*) Ay, ay, sir. (*He goes.*)

COLUMBUS. (*Recalling him*) And Diego!

DIEGO. (*Coming back*) Yes, sir.

COLUMBUS. This is the quarter-deck.

DIEGO. Yes, sir.

COLUMBUS. A good sailor knows his place.

DIEGO. (*With repressed fury*) Yes, sir.

(COLUMBUS points off; DIEGO, scarcely concealing a scowl, goes off.)

COLUMBUS. (*To PEDRO*) A surly dog!

PEDRO. And a dangerous one. He does more than his share to inspire discontent.

COLUMBUS. I have remarked it.

(COLUMBUS is thoughtful for a moment and remains stationary. Presently he goes onto the poop and looks out to sea. PEDRO follows him. Simultaneously, PEPE, the page-boy, emerges from the hatchway, against which he stands, out

of sight of the others. When they begin to talk he listens eagerly.)

COLUMBUS. Easterly, ever easterly. God is in the wind, Don Pedro.

PEDRO. (*With a short laugh*) The crew would say that it is the devil, rather, Captain. All day, and every day, the wind blows easterly, blowing them away from their homes and their country, their wives and children, their friends and sweethearts.

COLUMBUS. (*Hastily*) You, too, Don Pedro? Do you, too, doubt?

PEDRO. Have I said so, Captain? Am I not here by your side, prepared?

COLUMBUS. Forgive me, friend. You are one of the few with faith, and it is not easy to hold fast to faith when nothing seems to warrant faith. Listen to that.

SEAMEN. (*Off, singing*)
Here's a keg o' rum
To Kingdom Come!
The Devil laughs,
But God is dumb!

(COLUMBUS and PEDRO descend to the quarter-deck.)

COLUMBUS. *Madre de Dios*, they drink too much.

PEDRO. They are simple men and must have their relaxation. (*The next words break from him almost involuntarily.*) We have not all your vision, Captain.

COLUMBUS. You *are* beginning to doubt, Don Pedro. Give me the contents of your mind. I am an impatient man and prone to be unjust; but—(*Whimsically*)—I mean well, Don Pedro. I mean well. Speak without fear.

PEDRO. (*At first with diffidence, but rapidly gain-*

ing confidence) Today is the 11th of October—more than two months since we saw the shores of Spain receding. You held a glittering hope of discovery before us, and we had faith. Day followed day, and soon we found ourselves in uncharted seas, but still we had faith. . . . I, at least, had faith. (*With dignity*) I am a man of some little learning, not easily led to wonder at natural phenomena as the unlettered might be. But I confess that I knew some uneasiness when the needle of the compass, instead of pointing to the constant North, jumped as if the devil had laid hand on it, and pointed to the north-west. I am not a child, nor a simpleton, nor a superstitious seaman; but there is such a thing as being too clever, prying into mysteries which were not meant for our eyes. In all humility, Captain, I ask if it is God's will that we should pursue this voyage in the face of every portent of ill-luck?

COLUMBUS. (*Impatiently*) It is *my* will. Is that not enough?

PEDRO. (*Bowing his head*) I am answered.

COLUMBUS. (*Hastily*) Forgive me, Don Pedro. A curb for my tongue—oh, a curb for my unbridled tongue, my worst enemy! (*More quietly*) My will, friend, because God's will. Shall that suffice?

PEDRO. (*Not appeased*) I do not claim your confidence, sir.

COLUMBUS. (*Thundering again*) But I claim yours. (*The sound of the SEAMAN's song is again heard.*) A blight upon their singing! Bid them stop.

(PEDRO goes off, with an air of discontent. When he is alone, COLUMBUS looks out at sea.)

COLUMBUS. (*Muttering*) Mystery? Would God implant the desire to solve mysteries and not provide the solution? (*Suddenly PEPE runs up the*

steps to the poop. COLUMBUS is startled.) Pañeta! Who is that?

PEPE. Me, Captain—Pepe!

COLUMBUS. (*Frowning on him*) Have you been there all the time?

PEPE. Please, sir, I am off duty.

COLUMBUS. Then why aren't you down below?

PEPE. (*Whimsically, knowing that he is privileged*) I prefer your company to theirs. (*He points below.*) Am I in the way here, sir?

COLUMBUS. (*Humoring him*) What a boy! And what do they say of the preference?

PEPE. I don't speak to them. I hate them.

COLUMBUS. Sh, Pepe! And get you gone! (*PEPE turns reluctantly.*) Quick! (*The boy goes more quickly.*) Here! You heard what Don Pedro said?

PEPE. Yes, Captain. And *he* is the best . . .

COLUMBUS. But even he doubts . . .

PEPE. Everybody doubts . . . except me.

COLUMBUS. (*Bitterly*) Everybody . . .

PEPE. (*Eagerly*) Except me, Captain, except me. (*He goes to him impetuously.*)

COLUMBUS. (*Laying a hand on the boy's head*) You are young enough to have faith. Thank you, boy.

(*The SEAMAN'S song is heard again.*)

PEPE. They are horrible when they drink too much. They say it makes them forget.

COLUMBUS. Poor fellows!

PEPE. (*Approaching nearer*) Captain, be careful! Sometimes they are desperate. (*The song surges up like a growl.*)

COLUMBUS. That is ugly. I bade Don Pedro stop them. So you think they might become dangerous. (*DON PEDRO returns.*) Go, boy. (*PEPE moves*

away, but does not go out.) Well, Don Pedro? Their singing changes to a roar. The deepening of their discontent is ominous. (*The noise grows louder.*)

PEDRO. Captain, they ignore my order.

COLUMBUS. (*Furious*) I'll make an example of one of them. (*Suddenly*) Hallo, there! What sneaking mischief-maker is that crawling about the deck? Show yourself!

(FRANCISCO appears from the right.)

COLUMBUS. Ho, Francisco,—you, is it?

FRANCISCO. Yes, sir. And I'm no sneaking mischief-maker.

COLUMBUS. Then why behave as one? Why are you here? Did I send for you? Is discipline obsolete in the Ocean Sea? Is Jack as good as his master nowadays?

FRANCISCO. (*Humbly*) Your words sting, sir!

COLUMBUS. And are meant to. I am tired of the mumbling and grumbling of the crew. I have been patient too long.

FRANCISCO. I came to warn you, sir. The temper of the crew is dangerous.

COLUMBUS. Danger is the breath of my life. I should doubt I lived if I lived outside danger.

FRANCISCO. (*The words springing from him spasmodically*) Our power of endurance has gone. We refuse to go on. I warn you. I respect your person and do not wish to see violence used; but it is more than mortal can bear, this endless sailing into unknown seas.

COLUMBUS. (*To PEDRO*) Don Pedro, the ship is in your hands. I will talk to our friend as man to man.

(PEDRO goes onto the poop. COLUMBUS, his voice

THE DISCOVERY

gentler, almost ingratiating, turns to FRANCISCO, who shifts from foot to foot, nervous by reason of the unaccustomed propinquity.)

COLUMBUS. Francisco, let me plead with you. There are men whom God has chosen for the working of His will. I am such a man. There is no more merit in me than in this ship: we are both instruments of God. Sometimes He chooses oddly: a stronger than I might have served His purpose better. But since God chose me, who shall withstand me? The four corners of the earth are to be linked up in the knowledge of their Savior. I have lifted the veils which obscured the prophecies of Holy Writ and I have learned that it was ordained that I, chosen among all men, should discover that great world beyond the ocean which I know exists as surely as I know that Heaven exists.

FRANCISCO. Must simple men suffer because of *your* knowledge?

COLUMBUS. (*Quickly*) Simple men shall do their duty.

FRANCISCO. There are limits to duty. Men will give up many things for duty and for gain, but you ask too much. Country, family, friends, perhaps even life itself—all these things you ask us to give up for *your* glory. *We* are not chosen of God to open up new ways: we are simple, humble men, sick for our homes and hungry for our wives.

COLUMBUS. My Heaven, Francisco, you try me . . .

FRANCISCO. (*Gaining courage*) Not more than you try us, sir. I come to you as a friend, sir. The men are at the end of their patience and spoiling for a fight. The stoutest rope breaks at last.

(The song swells up again. Spoken words mingle

with the song, and the voice of GUILLERMO IRES is heard above the rest.)

FRANCISCO. Did you hear that, sir?

COLUMBUS. I heard the snarling of angry beasts.

FRANCISCO. You heard the just complaints of angry men, sir.

(Again GUILLERMO'S voice pierces the din. COLUMBUS stands rigid, endeavoring to catch the words.)

FRANCISCO. Did you hear that, sir?

PEPE. *(Who has been unobserved)* They shan't! They shan't!

COLUMBUS. Boy, come here. What were the words?

PEPE. *(Almost weeping)* He said: "The Santa Maria will be the lighter for his carcase."

COLUMBUS. *(Bitterly)* He said that, did he? *(He blinks—is moved more than he will show.)*

FRANCISCO. I am sorry, sir. . . . I knew how high feeling had run.

COLUMBUS. *(Authoritatively)* Send Guillermo Ires to me!

FRANCISCO. *(Not without diffidence)* Sorry, sir, but . . .

COLUMBUS. Discipline knows no buts.

FRANCISCO. *(Angrily)* Discipline is a thing of the past, sir. It's you or us.

COLUMBUS. *(To DON PEDRO)* Don Pedro, let Guillermo Ires be sent to me. He shall know what it is like in irons.

(PEDRO is halfway down the stairs to the quarter-deck when GUILLERMO IRES and other SEAMEN rush in an angry mass toward COLUMBUS, growling like infuriated animals.)

COLUMBUS. *(In a thunderous voice)* Stop! What is the meaning of this wild uproar? *(The men stand transfixed.)* The first man to move shall spend the rest of the night in irons!

(There is a perceptible pause, during which nobody moves. Then, with a wild cry, GUILLERMO DE IRES breaks away from the others and advances toward COLUMBUS.)

GUILLERMO. And who's to put him in irons? We are thirty to one.

COLUMBUS. *(Calmly)* If nobody else is available for the office, I will perform it myself. Get below! Let me hear no more of this.

GUILLERMO. *(In high excitement)* We've stood too much. We've been duped day in, day out. We're men with the common feelings of men. We want our homes and our women. I say the *Santa Maria* shall turn her helm toward Spain at once, or we are not men but sheep.

COLUMBUS. *(Still calm)* And who shall navigate her?

GUILLERMO. There's plenty here who can do that. The Devil's with you, we all know that, riding the easterly wind; but we are not men unused to the sea. Once clear of this Devil's track to nowhere, we'll blow our way back to home.

(Signs of assent from the rest of the crew. COLUMBUS raises his hand, appealing for silence. He is paler than his wont, but very calm.)

COLUMBUS. Don Guillermo, you are an excellent sailor, a man of abundant resourcefulness. Some day, if your tongue does not run away with your discretion, you will achieve prosperity in your calling. Today you are an able-bodied seaman and no

more: I am your captain. Your duty is to obey me as mine is to obey the Royal Sovereigns of Spain who sent me. Let that be clearly understood between us and we shall not fall out. Now return to your duties.

(Again a perceptible pause. COLUMBUS' authoritative manner holds them. Presently DIEGO breaks out.)

DIEGO. Words for children! Froth and scum! We are men: reason with us!

COLUMBUS. Silence!

(The tone of authority calms the men, who remain, however, in a huddled crowd, murmuring discontentedly. COLUMBUS turns and goes up the stairs to the poop, where he stands and looks down upon the men.)

DIEGO. *(Snarling)* I suppose you think you're on holy ground now? *(He bounds toward the stairs.)*

VOICES. *(Tumultuously)* Have him down! Pitch him overboard! Put him in irons! Devil's tool! Italian renegade!

(They are about to stampede up the poop gangway, when PEPE runs to the foot of the stairs and stands with his arms spread out.)

PEPE. Cowards! Cowards! You will have to kill me first!

VOICES. Out of the way! Devil's whelp! Lick-spittle!

COLUMBUS. What! Does that child stand between me and death? *(Silence follows the commencement of his speech.)* Pepe! Come here!

PEPE. (*Going to him quickly*) My Captain!
(*The men are somewhat sheepish.*)

COLUMBUS. Pepe! This is a voyage of discovery. (*The men growl.*) I set out to discover a new world, a radiant land beyond unknown seas; to find new wealth and dominion for our Sovereign King and Queen, new souls for the sacrifice of our Savior to redeem. So far, I have discovered but one thing. (*He pauses and continues with slow deliberation.*) I have discovered that when a man is given a vision he must follow it alone. Loyalty passes like seaweed on an outgoing-tide. Friendship breaks as a mast hollowed by worms breaks. Discipline, duty, and honorable obedience are bubbles that burst at the first contact. There remains but oneself. That is my only discovery, so far, Pepe.

PEPE. (*His eyes gleaming with excitement*) Captain, I am loyal, I am still obedient, still your devoted servant. . . .

COLUMBUS. (*With some emotion*) I am not ungrateful.

PEDRO. (*Scraping his throat; with dignity*) I hope my loyalty has never been in question, sir. (*He salutes.*)

COLUMBUS. (*Returning the salute*) You have sometimes been silent, Don Pedro, when speech would have made your loyalty clear. But I thank you. . . .

(*COLUMBUS turns and looks out at sea; for a moment his attention is fixed. He peers more earnestly into the darkness. There is a movement among the men. He turns.*)

JUAN. We are simple men, sir. . . .

COLUMBUS. (*Hastily*) Shall simple men judge their betters?

GUILLERMO. (*Surlily*) We may as well wait till to-morrow, at any rate.

COLUMBUS. Dark deeds are better done in the dark.

(GUILLERMO, *scowling but sheepish, slinks off, followed by one or two of the SEAMEN.*)

FRANCISCO. Desperate men do not always act up to the best that is in them, sir.

COLUMBUS. (*With quiet irony*) I thank you for reminding me, Francisco. Your best cannot be bettered. Good night!

(FRANCISCO *half-turns to speak again, but thinks better of it and goes, shamefaced. Several others go, too, sheepish. A brief silence. COLUMBUS does not move; he is struggling with overwrought emotion. When he speaks his voice is not steady.*)

COLUMBUS. Go, boy!

(PEPE *seizes his hand, kisses it, and hastily descends to the quarter-deck and goes out.*)

COLUMBUS. (*Turning to PEDRO*) Two minutes ago, Don Pedro, I saw . . . I thought I saw . . . (*He peers into the blackness.*) It was . . . It is . . .

PEDRO. (*In excitement*) What, sir?

COLUMBUS. A light, faintly flickering, rising up and down. Look! (*He points.*)

PEDRO. It is, sir! Glory be to God!

(*At this moment there is a wild shout, off.*)

VOICE. (*Off*) A light! A light! Land! Land!

THE DISCOVERY

(A SAILOR comes running on, delirious with joy and excitement.)

SAILOR. Did you see it, sir? A light! Blessed Mother of God! A light!

COLUMBUS. (*With quiet authority*) Give the order to heave to.

CURTAIN

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Daddy Long-Legs

A charming comedy in 4 acts, by Jean Webster. 6 males, 7 females, and 6 orphans, but by easy doubling of some characters, may be played by 4 males, 4 females and 3 orphans. The orphans appear only in the first act and may be played by small girls. 4 easy interiors. Costumes modern. Plays $2\frac{1}{2}$ hours.

The New York Times wrote the following:

"If you will take your pencil and write down, one below the other, the words delightful, charming, sweet, beautiful and entertaining, and then draw a line and add them up, the answer will be 'Daddy Long-Legs'. To that result you might even add brilliant, pathetic and humorous, but the answer even then would be just what it was before—the play which Miss Jean Webster has made from her book, 'Daddy Long-Legs'. To attempt to describe the simplicity and beauty of 'Daddy Long-Legs' would be like attempting to describe the first breath of Spring after an exceedingly tiresome and hard Winter."

Enjoyed a two-years' run in New York and was then toured for over three years. Royalty, \$25.00. Price, 75 cents.

To the Ladies

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The authors of "Dulcy" have divulged a secret known to every woman—and to some men, though the men don't admit it.

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One of the "five million", Clarence served where he was sent—though it was no further than Texas. As an entomologist he found—on this side of the ocean—no field for his specialty, so they set him to driving mules.

Now, reduced to civil life and seeking a job, he finds a position in the home of one Wheeler, a wealthy man with a family. And because he'd "been in the army" he becomes guide, philosopher and friend to the members of that distracted family group. Clarence's position is an anomalous one. He mends the plumbing, tunes the piano, types—off stage—and plays the saxophone. And around him revolves such a group of characters as only Booth Tarkington could offer. It is a real American comedy, at which the audience ripples with appreciative and delighted laughter.

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A young automobile salesman just out of his 'teens inherits a girl's school and insists on running it himself, according to his own ideas, chief of which is that the dominant feature in the education of the young girl of today should be CHARM.

In the end the young man gives up the school and promises to wait until the youngest of his pupils reaches a marriagable age.

"The Charm School" has the freshness of youth, the inspiration of a novel idea, the charm of originality, and wholesome, amusing entertainment. We strongly recommend it for high school production.

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